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Utopias, Dystopias & the End of the World

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Dystopia

Dystopia is the opposite of utopia. Merriam Webster defines dystopia as "an imaginary place where people lead dehumanized and often fearful lives." There are many ways to define dystopia, just as there are many ways to define utopia. The Merriam Webster definition is a good place to start, however, dystopia is much more complex than that. Dystopia can be looked at in two ways, from the outside in or from the inside out. More often than not spectators, not participating in the society, judge dystopias from the outside in. This is valid because most dystopias are only imaginary. However, if those spectators were to place themselves into that dystopia, they may change their mind about the dystopian qualities of that society. This is because dystopias are often rooted in utopias. Dystopias are often used as a satire of the culture in which the author is living. To sum all this up, a dystopia, when looked at in the traditional way of being judged by outsiders, is a place or society in which the population is oppressed and unhappy. This can play out in many different ways.

Overpopulation is a common scenario in which dystopian societies are depicted. In these stories, a country is overwhelmed with people. This leads to a shortage of resources for the masses. Often in these situations, the majority of the immense population is suffering greatly; they are starving and living in poor, crowded conditions. Conversely, there usually ^{are} is a select few who are wealthy and

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live luxuriously. An example of this type of dystopia is the movie *Soylent Green*. In this story the main character is one of the masses of people who is starving in a world that is under sustained. In the end of the movie, he finds that the main source of food for the poor is actually made of humans. This is not only a dystopian society because the majority of the population is starving and living on nothing, but also due to the gap between the wealthy and everyone else. This, in my opinion, is one of the more plausible dystopian societies for our world today. I believe that we are already well on our way to this. The current population in India, according to the 2011 census, is more than 1.21 billion people. These people are sharing only approximately 1.2 million square miles. India represents 15% of the world's population and is the second largest country ^{population wise} behind China. Not only is the world clearly crowded, but it also has the dystopian characteristic of the huge wealth gap. This gap has been the main focus of those that are occupying Wall Street in the recent weeks. Those protesting are claiming that they are the "99%". It has recently been stated that 40% of the world's wealth is held by only 1% of the population. This uneven distribution ^{of wealth} suggests that we could be on our way to this *Soylent Green* dystopia.

Another type of dystopia depicted in the media is that in which society is dictated by either a totalitarian government or by a few corporations. Examples of this include movies such as *V for Vendetta* and *The Handmaid's Tale* as well as books including *The Hunger Games* and *Uglies*. In all of these stories, the few people who run the government and society control the population. The people are controlled through brainwashing, propaganda and media. The possibility of questioning those

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in power is unheard of. Those living under this rule live in terror of what the government could do to them if they found that someone was doubting their authority and planning a revolt. In *The Hunger Games*, the population lives in fear of the "Capitol". The Capitol includes the rich and powerful. They exercise their power over the greater population by holding what they call "the hunger games". This requires children from each of the districts under Capitol control, to fight to their death. The games are televised and celebrated. Those living in this society, Panem, live in constant fear of those in the Capitol. They are not allowed to think for themselves and if they do they are harshly punished. In these totalitarian dystopias, the general public is not permitted to question nor rebel; they are not able to go against the few and the powerful. This type of dystopia is also plausible and possible in this world; in fact we see it in current North Korea. The North Koreans are kept away from the rest of the world as to not be influenced by outside forces that may disagree with the teachings of the government. As outsiders we know this is a dystopia because those living under this totalitarian rule are limited in what they are and are not able to do according to the "ruler". As far as this happening in the United States, it's hard to say. I think that it is one of the more possible types of dystopia but I don't think it's as likely as the overpopulation scenario. Already, the government is playing a bigger role in the lives of Americans and corporations also have a heavy hand in influencing the government and in turn, the population. In addition to this, the media is very influential which is a characteristic of this dystopia. I don't think we're quite there yet but I could see us possibly getting there someday.

The next type of dystopia will bring us back to the idea of looking from the outside in. This kind of dystopia can be called that of a perceived utopia. In this dystopia, those living in it may think that they are in fact living in a utopia. This category includes works such as Huxley's *Brave New World*, Lowry's *The Giver*, and the movie *Pleasantville*. Those living in these societies are happy because they know nothing else. These are often the most satirical types of dystopias. In these stories, the authors take what may be traditionally thought of as utopian ideals, and show how it would not be ideal or utopian at all. From the inside, the people are happy but from the outside it is clear that they are living in a society that is either terribly controlled or they just cannot think of anything else. In these situations we see that those living in these worlds are deprived of natural human rights and characteristics. For example, in both *The Giver* and in *Pleasantville*, barely anyone is able to feel anything. They are deprived of the human characteristic of emotion, which is what separates humans from other animals. The cycle is generally broken when someone from the outside, who knows what's missing, comes and shows the people the error of their ways so to speak. This, of course, suggests that the person is introducing a better way of life. I don't see this a very plausible situation in our world because in order for this to happen, a utopian place must exist first, and as far as I have heard, there isn't one of those anywhere around here. This does however, happen on a much smaller scale daily. The phrase "ignorance is bliss" comes to mind. Many people live life without asking questions that they don't want to know the answer to. For example, many people do not know where their food comes from

good point

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when you find it let me know 😊

and when they finally realize how it works, they're no longer in their own little food
utopia. It's just a matter of deciding if it is in fact better to know the truth or not.



Mmmmm McDonald's
anyone?

The last dystopia I will address is that of technological takeover. In this dystopian world, machines run everything and humans no longer have any power. We see this in movies such as *The Matrix*. This is scary to think about because humans have always controlled technology and the idea that those roles could become reversed seems wrong. Humans like to control themselves and everything around them. They like to use technology, not be used by it. However true this may be, it is clear that this is not always how it works, even in today's world. With the ever-increasing level of technology, such as smart phones and self-parking cars, people are relying on technology more and more daily. Artificial intelligence is something that is also becoming more sophisticated all the time. Where will this end? How far should we be taking this? In the movie *The Incredibles*, Mr. Incredible has to fight a "learning robot" that got too smart and started to wonder why it had to take orders. Though this is just a cartoon for kids, it brings up a good example of how robots could one day become too smart. Another real-world example is that of the self-parking cars. There are now cars that will parallel park themselves. If a computer can parallel park better than a person, who's to say that a computer can't drive and think better than a human too? I think a technological takeover could be very likely.

No way! I loved *The Incredibles*

Clearly the theme of dystopia is a common one in our culture today, but why? What purpose does it serve? Dystopian works are often a satire, a means to add commentary to the world in which the author is living. Also, it serves as

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entertainment. People like to be scared; we like to think of these seemingly crazy ideas. It is similar to why people slow down to look at a car crash; these terrors fascinate people for some reason. Dystopias can serve as societal warnings as well, what could happen if things don't change, if we keep travelling down the same path. They can also put life into perspective. Dystopias can make us say, "See? It's not so bad now..." Clearly, dystopian novels and movies come in many different variations and can serve many different purposes depending on what the author wishes to get across to the audience.

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Your writing has a good flow. I hear your voice. Spelling etc. Pretty good. Conclusion a bit weak.